



SCOPING DOCUMENT

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Target 4 Exploration Project

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Bridgeport Ranger District

Mineral County, Nevada

August 2015

Comments Welcome

The Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is initiating scoping and welcomes comments on the proposed Target 4 Exploration Project (Project), which is located on National Forest System lands within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The project proponent (Great Western Mining Company [GWC]) proposes to conduct mineral exploration on the southern flank of the Excelsior Mountains in Huntoon Valley, Mineral County, approximately 65 miles southwest of Hawthorne, Nevada.

The District has tentatively determined that this proposed activity may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) [36 CFR 220]. A proposed action may be categorically excluded only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and the proposed action is within a category listed in section 31.12 or 32.2 of FSH 1909.15. This proposed action falls within section 32.2(8) –

(8) Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads (36 CFR 220.6(e)(8)).

In developing the Project, the Forest Service encourages the participation of interested persons, businesses, state and local governments, and Native American tribes at this time and throughout the process prior to the decision by the Responsible Official. The Project Plan of Operations can be reviewed at the Bridgeport Ranger District during normal business hours and on the project web page (see How to Comment).

Purpose and Need for Action

The Bridgeport Ranger District received a Plan of Operations (POO #02-14-03) in August 2014 from Enviroscientists, Inc. proposing an exploration drilling project for base metals in the Huntoon Mining District, Mineral County, Nevada. The agency's need is to respond to the proponent's submittal of a Plan of Operations (POO) and to ensure operations will be conducted so as to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources (36 CFR 228.8, Subpart A) where feasible. The purpose of this proposed action is to authorize mineral exploration activities consistent with the statutory right of the proponent to explore for and develop mineral resources on federally-administered lands under the General Mining Law of 1872 and with other laws and regulations. The decision for the Forest Service to make is whether to approve the POO as submitted or to approve it with additional measures to protect surface resources. The proponent's need is to determine if economically viable mineral deposits exist within the proposed project area, and to define the nature, extent, shape, and economic value of such deposits.

Project Location

The Project is located in the Bridgeport Ranger District approximately 65 miles southwest of Hawthorne, Nevada. The Project Area lies on the southern flanks of the Excelsior Mountains in Huntoon Valley, Mineral County, Nevada. Exploration activities would occur in all or portions of Section 35 and 36, Township 4 North, Range 31 East, and Section 2, Township 3 North, Range 31 East, Mount Diablo Base & Meridian. The location reference maps are the Huntoon Valley and Little Huntoon Valley Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute quadrangles. Figure 1 shows the general location and access for the Project.

There are no perennial streams, springs or ponds within the Project Area. Jack Springs Creek is situated approximately 2.3 miles southeast from the nearest proposed disturbance, and Huntoon Creek is located approximately 4.3 miles southwest from the nearest proposed disturbance.

Proposed Action Summary

The proposed action is for the Forest Service to authorize GWC to conduct mineral exploration for base minerals by drilling boreholes at 12 proposed sites on lands managed by the US Forest Service. The project is expected to start in the Autumn of 2015 and would have a duration of one year. Final reclamation seeding may occur in successive years after the initial one year period after project startup if necessary to maximize the chances of revegetation success.

Approval of the POO would authorize GWC to drill exploration boreholes to collect subsurface samples for resource evaluation at up to 12 constructed drill pads. The proposed drill pads will each have a working area with dimensions of approximately 30 ft. by 90 ft. A maximum of 2 boreholes may be drilled from the same pad. The drill pads will be accessed utilizing existing roads, 8,711 linear feet of overland travel routes, and 5,094 feet of constructed road. Slopes range from zero to 40 percent in the Project Area. The locations of the drill sites, existing roads, overland travel routes, and constructed road are shown on Figure 2. Locations of the drill sites and roads may be adjusted based on the results of biological and cultural surveys in order to avoid any sensitive areas. Total proposed area of disturbance for combined overland travel

routes and constructed roads is calculated to be 4.5 acres. The proposed area of disturbance for the drill pads is 0.7 acre. The total surface disturbance proposed by the Project is 5.2 acres.

GWC will conduct exploration drilling with up to two track or buggy-mounted reverse circulation drills. Drill holes may be vertical or angled, with depth of holes on average to be 1000 feet. One 20 ft. x 15 ft. x 10 ft. sump will be excavated within the disturbance area of each drill pad for use in trapping drill cuttings and managing drilling fluids during drilling operations. Drilling operations will be managed to capture and control cuttings, prevent the discharge of drill cuttings and fluids into drainages or down-slope areas, and to keep work sites safe and clean. All drill holes will be plugged as an operational procedure immediately after completion of drilling in accordance with Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 534.420(6) or 534.4371(2)b. Drill site locations may be relocated within the Project Area depending on drilling results and in coordination with the USFS.

Equipment required for drilling will include, in addition to the track or buggy-mounted reverse circulation drills, up to two 2,000 to 3,000 gallon all-terrain water vehicles, up to two pipe trucks, up to two booster trucks, one D6 or equivalent dozer, one backhoe, up to two auxiliary air compressors, and up to two portable light plants/generators. GWC will store equipment and material that will be utilized for proposed exploration activities within the disturbance area of constructed drill sites. Drilling is proposed to operate two shifts per day, seven days per week. Work crews will stay in surrounding towns and commute daily to the Project Area.

For reclamation, sumps would be allowed to dry and then would be backfilled with excavated material and covered with stockpiled soil. Drill pads would be recontoured. Where necessary, overland travel routes would be repaired or scarified. Disturbed areas would be raked and seeded with a Forest Service-approved native seed mix. A portion of the reclamation bond would be held for at least three growing seasons to ensure successful revegetation and control of noxious weeds.

Specific measures designed to minimize adverse environmental impacts currently include, but are not limited to, the following:

- All equipment would be washed prior to entering the area to prevent the introduction of noxious weed seeds.
- Cultural resources identified during a survey of the project area would be avoided by Project activities.
- If undiscovered archaeological or cultural resources are encountered during Project work, activity in that area would cease immediately, the Forest Service would be notified, and the resources would be evaluated. The results of the evaluation would determine subsequent action.
- Ground disturbing activities from May 15th to August 31st would be avoided to protect nesting migratory birds or a nest survey would be conducted prior to disturbance and sites of nesting activity would be avoided.
- Sumps would have escape ramps for wildlife and livestock.

Mineral exploration in the proposed project area conforms to the Toiyabe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986 (Toiyabe Management Plan), particularly the following Standards and Guidelines for Minerals:

1- Encourage exploration and development of mineral resources and minimizing possible adverse impacts to surface resource.

4 – Require operating plans which minimize impacts to surface and cultural resources and provide for reclamation of disturbed areas. (p. IV-57)

23 - Reasonable access for mineral exploration, development, and production is guaranteed under the mining laws. The type of access approved will be consistent with the logical development of mineral properties. (p. IV-59)

Toiyabe Management Plan Management Area 8 direction:

Livestock grazing and development of minerals will be done in a manner that protects key dispersed recreation, wildlife, and fisheries resources. (p. IV-124)

How to Comment

Written comments, concerns, or suggestions for this Project should be mailed to Jeff Ulrich, District Ranger, Bridgeport Ranger District, HC 62, Box 1000, Bridgeport, CA 93517; or sent by facsimile to (760) 932-5899; or hand delivered to 75694 Hwy 395, Bridgeport, CA, during normal business hours of 8:00 am to 12:00 pm and 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Oral comments should be provided during normal business hours via telephone (760-932-5821), in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments.

To provide electronic comments, copy the following web address into your browser's address bar: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46685&exp=overview> and click on "Comment on Project" in the list of links on the right side of the web page that opens. To submit electronic comments after the period for the comment web form ends on September 7, 2015, you should email your comments to the project contact as given under "Request More Info" on the project web page. Please use the term "Marietta T-4 #02-14-03" in the subject line of your email.

Copies of all comments submitted, including names and addresses, may be made available to the public. Comments will typically be posted in the "Public Reading Room" on the project web page unless they contain offensive language or meet other criteria for exclusion.

To be most effective, comments should be received by the Forest Service no later than **September 7, 2015**.

Contact Information

For further information on this Project, visit the project web page at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46685&exp=overview>, or contact David Risley (760-932-5821, davidrisley@fs.fed.us). The project web page can also be accessed by first going to the Forest's home page at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/htnf/>, clicking on "NEPA Projects" in the Quick Links on the right side of the web page, and then scrolling down to the project link. We thank you for your interest in our National Forests.

JEFF ULRICH
Bridgeport District Ranger

Date

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(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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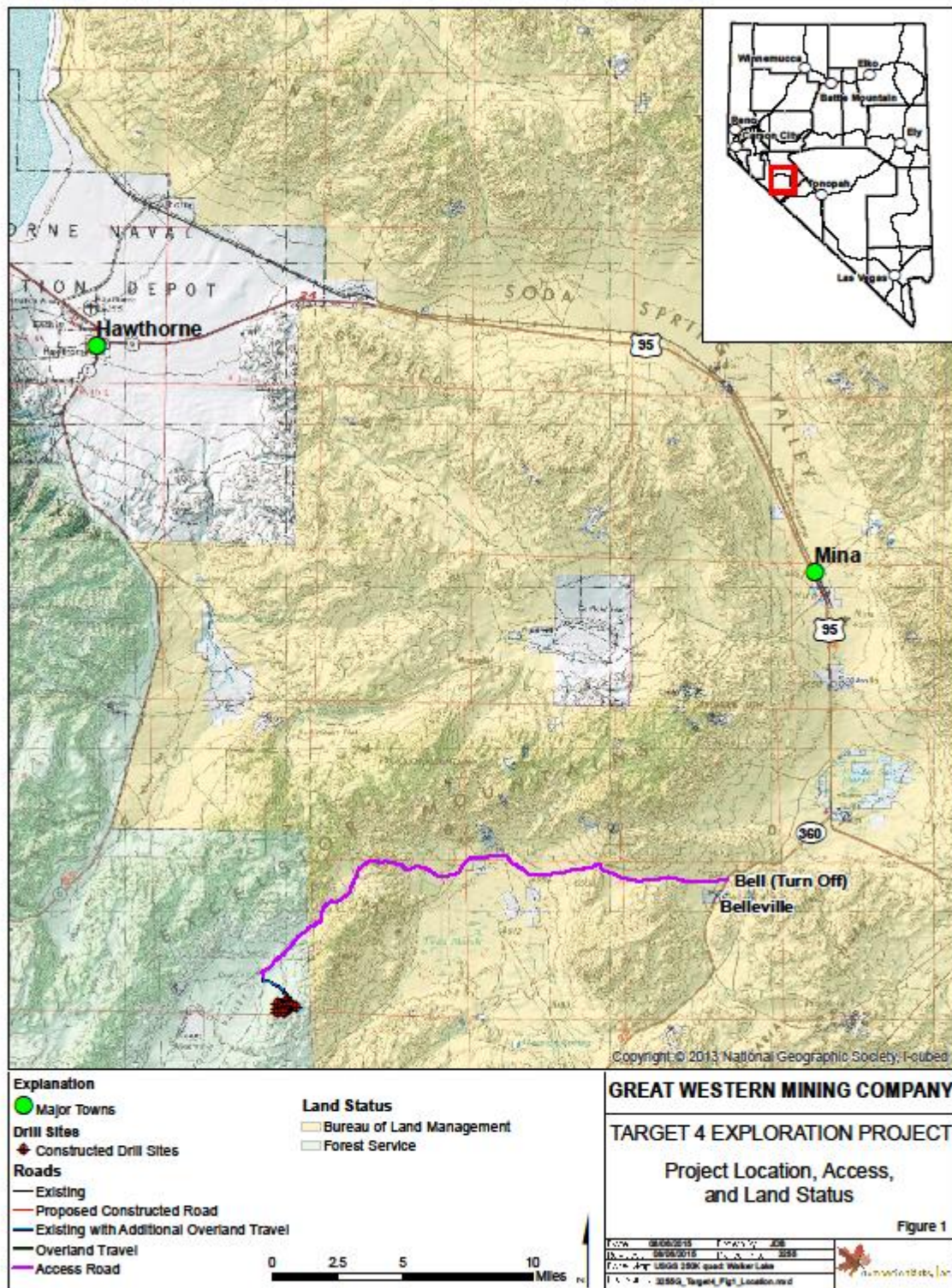


Figure 1. T-4 Exploration Project – Location Map & Project Access.

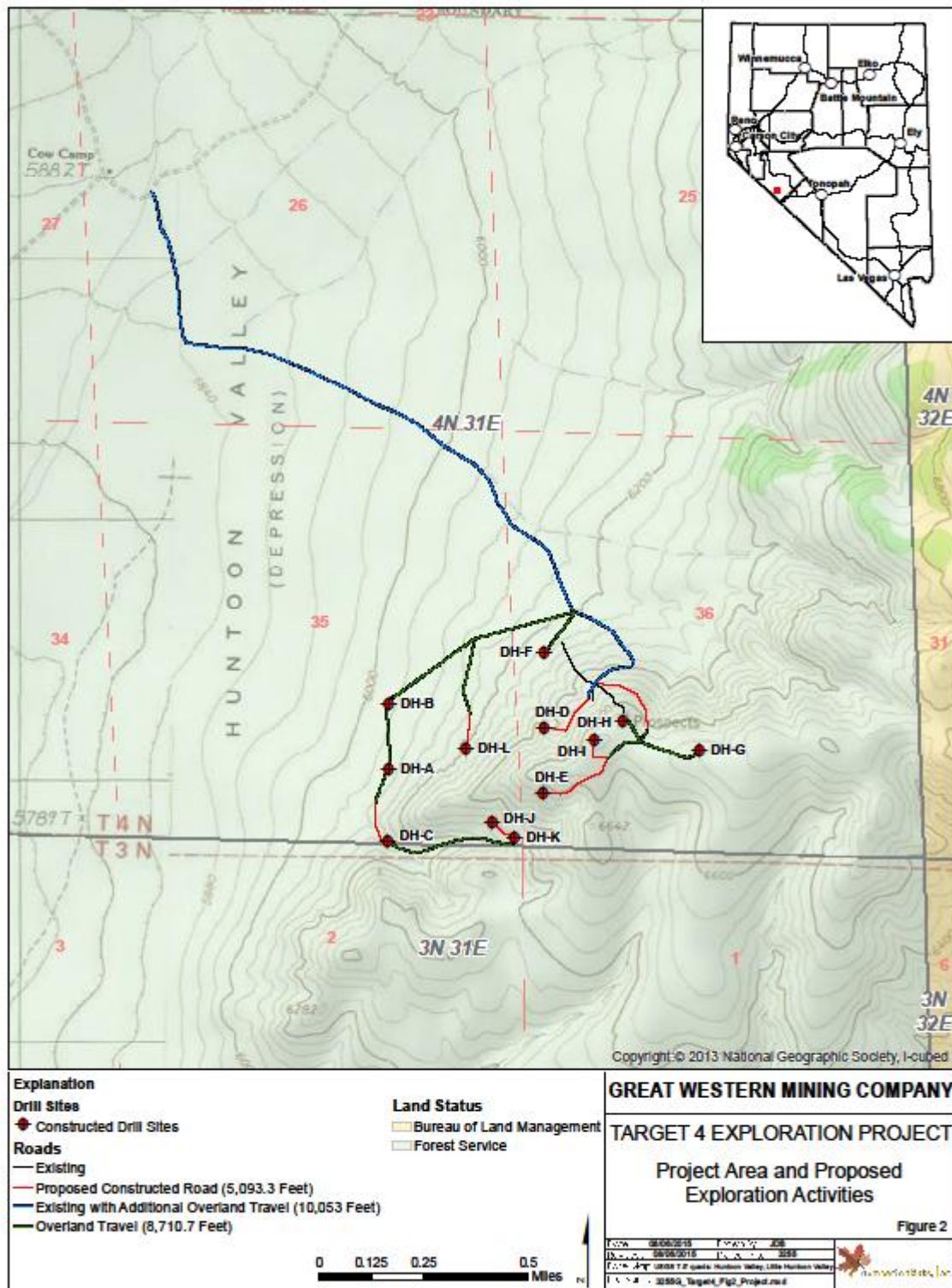


Figure 2. T-4 Exploration Project – Proposed Drill Sites & Overland and Constructed Routes.